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ACTION MEMORANDUM

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14pm

TO: The Secretary
FROM: ARA - John A. Bushnell, Acting
SUBJECT: Ambassador Bowdler's Visit to Argentina
Should Be Postpone?

JUL 28 1980

Department of State, ACIS/PS/SPR

Character: (U) Release () Excise () Deny (U) Declassify
Exemptions b () () E.O. 13526 25x () ()

Declassify after 7/29

With concurrence of:

obtained

Date 12.4.16

ISSUE FOR DECISION

Ambassador Bowdler is now scheduled to visit Argentina July 30 to August 2. The issue for your decision is whether information about Argentine involvement in the Bolivian coup warrants a postponement of Ambassador Bowdler's visit. A decision is needed today, Monday, July 28, as Ambassador Bowdler has suggested he return aboard Mrs. Carter's plane, which departs Lima early Tuesday morning, July 29.

Recommendation

Although it is a close call and many in ARA believe our overall policy interests in Argentina tip the balance in favor of continuing, I recommend that you authorize Ambassador Bowdler to postpone his visit.

Approve

JUL 28 1980

Disapprove

Alternatively, that Ambassador Bowdler proceed with his visit to Argentina.

Approve

Disapprove

ESSENTIAL FACTORS

INR has prepared a memorandum summarizing the evidence of Argentine involvement in the Bolivian coup. While it is not conclusive, the information points at least to support by some elements of the Argentine military.

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BY S/SAC

Some elements within the Argentine leadership are probably not in complete agreement about the propriety of such involvement, and others, particularly within the Foreign Ministry, probably were unaware of the extent of Argentina's involvement. However, we believe the senior leaders of the GOA (the President, the Junta, and senior members of the Army) were aware of Argentine involvement and that it was significant.

Last Saturday, GOA military officials indicated to our Defense Attaché that Argentina was planning to recognize the new Bolivian regime today. Separately, Argentine Ambassador Aja Espil said such action would be taken simultaneously with Brazil and possibly Uruguay and Paraguay (so as to avoid any one of them being first). Subsequently, probably taking into account Ambassador Castro's arguments against the timing of this action, the GOA informed our Embassy in Buenos Aires it had decided not to recognize the new Bolivian regime before Ambassador Bowdler's visit. We do not expect to be able to delay recognition of the Bolivian regime, or continuation of relations, indefinitely by Argentina and others, including ourselves.

Regardless of the timing of recognition, the key point is that the Argentines have exported their worst government terrorist techniques to Bolivia in support of a totally unwarranted military coup.

As fundamental is the question of USG interests in Argentina and the effect on them of a postponement of the Bowdler visit. The Department is under a Presidential directive to improve relations with Argentina this year. However, this Presidential decision was made before Argentine involvement in the Bolivian coup. The visit by Ambassador Bowdler was one of the key recommendations for achieving this goal. We have important objectives in improving GOA cooperation in the following areas:

-- Restrictions on grain sales to the Soviets: While we have reached a confidential understanding with the GOA, they have not agreed to restrict sales to the Soviets beyond October. Overall we are seeking to blunt Soviet political and economic influence in Argentina.

-- Nuclear non-proliferation: We seek GOA ratification of the Treaty of Tlateloco and safeguard assurances.

-- Progress within Argentina with respect to human rights issues: We seek assurances concerning disappearances,

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- 3 -

a reduction of political prisoners, and a restoration of judicial guarantees.

THE ISSUE

Whether to proceed with Ambassador Bowdler's visit as planned.

PRO

-- A visit to Buenos Aires now will give Assistant Secretary Bowdler an opportunity to make arguments personally to President Videla concerning the nature of the new Bolivian rulers and the implications of GOA support for such a regime. Ambassador Bowdler may be able to persuade Argentina to exercise a moderating influence on the Bolivian military.

-- As the U.S. Presidential elections draw near, the GOA probably will become more intransigent -- or, at least, more inclined to wait -- on issues on which they believe there are differences of opinion within the U.S. They may be less forthcoming on grains (they have noted Governor Reagan's declaration on the embargo), human rights (they believe a Republican administration would reverse present policy of U.S. military sales restrictions and our position with respect to loans for Argentina in the IFIs), and on nonproliferation.

-- A postponement of the visit would deny the USG opportunity to raise these issues with the GOA through an especially persuasive communicator of our views and would be likely to produce a set-back to the achievement of our objectives in these areas.

-- Postponing the visit, no matter how explained, could be taken as a confrontational move by Argentina and lead to a nationalistic response which would strengthen the position of the hardliners and make cooperation on their part on any issue, including Bolivia, more difficult.

CON

-- A visit by Ambassador Bowdler at this time could be considered, here and in Argentina and Bolivia as evidence that the US does not attach great significance to reports of Argentine complicity or support for the Bolivian coup.

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- 4 -

-- The Bolivian issue is of Hemispheric importance, and a visit to Argentina at this time could be taken as a signal throughout the Hemisphere of US approval of military governments.

-- Postponement of Ambassador Bowdler's visit would be a clearer signal of U.S. disappointment of Argentina involvement in the Bolivian coup than anything he could say to Argentine officials during the visit as now planned.

-- We need some further time for the situation to clarify in Bolivia before having a systematic discussion of it with Argentina.

-- The immediacy of the Bolivian events, the concentration of the press on those events and the degree of Argentine involvement, and the necessity, therefore, for Ambassador Bowdler to confront the Argentines publicly and privately on this issue will make it is unlikely that the mission can accomplish its constructive purposes. (It is unlikely that either you or he could remain silent on the Bolivia-Argentine ties in the face of the Bowdler visit there and what will almost certainly be increased press and OAS focus on these ties.)

-- Ambassador Bowdler himself strongly recommends his mission be postponed.

Drafted: ARA/AND:SMB/Block/WEK/nepper
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